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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [PHUM](#) [MASS](#) [GT](#) [CG](#) [UG](#) [SU](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: REACTION TO DEATH OF PEACEKEEPERS IN THE CONGO

REF: A. KINSHASA 108 AND PREVIOUS (NOTAL)

[B](#). 2005 GUATEMALA 828 (NOTAL)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The deaths of eight Guatemalan peacekeepers in the Congo has provoked some criticism of Guatemalan participation in international peacekeeping. The Guatemalan President praised the dead peacekeepers as heroes and reiterated his government's continued commitment to UN peacekeeping missions. A French media report claiming that the Guatemalans were involved in a clandestine war criminal hunt has added to the controversy, and the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry has asked the UN for an accounting. The death of the peacekeepers was a rude surprise for most Guatemalans who know little about the UN Mission in the Congo. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The deaths of eight Guatemalan Army Special Forces (Kaibil) soldiers in the January 23 clash with Lords Resistance Army (LRA) guerrillas in the northern Congo provoked expressions of concern among human rights groups, the media, politicians and the general public. With some dissenting voices, the general attitude captured by the commentary was one of wondering why the Guatemalan military was participating in a peacekeeping mission in Africa while Guatemala remained beset with many problems, especially a critical level of crime and violence. A Le Monde report claiming that the Guatemalans were engaged in a clandestine British Intelligence-directed hunt for LRA leader Vincent Otti only intensified the criticisms. Guatemalan Government Human Rights Ombudsman Sergio Morales demanded an investigation of the circumstances of the attack, stating that "we want to know why the soldiers were alone, what their orders were, what intelligence gathering mission they had, and who their commander was." The media mangled the issue of funding for Guatemalan participation, leading Catholic prelate Cardinal Quezada to criticize (wrongly) the GOG for spending on this deployment \$5.3 million that could have been spent on schools for Guatemalan children.

[1](#)3. (U) While the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry has asked the UN for a full accounting of the Congo incident that addresses the Le Monde claims, the GOG has vowed its continued support for the peacekeeping mission. After the news broke about the deaths, Guatemalan President Berger praised the peacekeepers as heroes, a comment that he repeated at a solemn and well-attended January 28 airport ceremony to receive the caskets of the peacekeepers. He also told the press that Guatemalans do not "bail out." The senior leadership of the Guatemalan military continues to strongly support participation in peacekeeping operations as a vehicle for enhancing the professionalization of the Guatemalan military (principally through exposure to other military forces and through experience gained in out-of-area joint operations). The Guatemalan Foreign Ministry remains equally supportive of efforts that it views as enhancing Guatemala's international reputation.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: The deaths of the Guatemalan peacekeepers were a great shock to all except the Guatemalan military, who were well aware of the risks of the MONUC deployment, and their missions (reconnaissance and hostage rescue) in it. Nor did it seem that anyone outside of the military was aware that MONUC is a Chapter Seven operation. Critics of the deployment who are making distinctions between offensive and defensive operations are equally uninformed about the Guatemalan contingent's missions, and about MONUC operations in support of upcoming April elections.

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